

A few weeks after the UK's other leading digi-rockers, The Prodigy, play Tokyo Bay NK Hall, The Chemical Brothers mount the same stage to deliver their decidedly more psychedelic take on the music. But, unlike The Prodigy, whose long-delayed new album has been put off yet again, the Chemicals arrive with a timely and acclaimed new CD, *Come With Us*.

In a sign of the importance of the Japanese market, the duo of Tom Rowlands and Edward Simons came to Japan in December for a special listening event at Womb in Shibuya and an unannounced appearance at underground dance club Maniac Love in Aoyama. The new album was revealed as another Chemicals tour de force, this time featuring the vocals of Richard Ashcroft, formerly of the Verve, and longtime collaborator Beth Orton.

The Chemical Brothers

Like The Prodigy, The Chemical Brothers face the challenge of convincing fans that, after an extended layoff since releasing their last album, their vision of rock-meets-electronica is still a convincing one. And, while perhaps not as fresh sounding as *Exit Planet Dust* and *Dig Your Own Hole* were in the mid-'90s, *Come With Us* is still a formidable outing. It contains one of the funkier-ever Chemicals tracks in the form of "Galaxy Bounce" and seldom sounds formulaic on its tour through breakbeats, funk, techno, house and rock 'n' roll.

Rowlands and Simons debuted under the Dust Brothers moniker, gradually developing a reputation for tracks like "Chemical Beats" and for the Sunday Social events they ran in London. Signing with Virgin in 1995, they renamed themselves The Chemical Brothers to

avoid threatened litigation from the West Coast-based hip hop production duo the Dust Brothers.

Since the success of the late '90s and their chart-topping 1999 album, *Surrender*, The Chemical Brothers shows have become consistent sell-outs in Japan, as witnessed by the capacity crowds at Liquid Room for the *Surrender* tour.

In another sign of their immense popularity here, two more shows have been added at centrally located Akasaka Blitz. Look for the concerts to be packed, and also keep your ears to the ground for word of any unannounced club appearances.

The Chemical Brothers play Akasaka Blitz on Feb 22-23 and Tokyo Bay NK Hall on Feb 24. See listings for details. ☐

CD REVIEWS

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ELECTRIC SOFT PARADE

Holes In The Wall

(BMG)

I'm not sure if the name refers to the Doors song, or to the endless parade of soft, sensitive, shoe-gazing electric guitar bands that seem to spring from England's wet soil like mushrooms after a rain. In any event, this Brighton-based group are the latest, greatest entry to the world of electronica-influenced post-Britpop. Mixing Beatles-style melodies with jangly guitars and ambient techno flourishes in equal measure, ESP's debut album comes off sounding something like an English version of French duo Air, but with less retro influences and more emphasis on distorted guitars. Describing themselves as "dark and introspective," ESP don't pull any punches on songs like the gritty "Why Do You Try So Hard To Hate Me." Although perhaps they are not the sort of band that'll cheer you up on a rainy day, ESP nonetheless do what they do with aplomb.



MYSTRAL TIDE

Whirlpools of Souls

(Zeitgeist)

The latest entrant to Tokyo's growing ranks of one-man production units working in tiny, six-tatami-mat recording studios is Mystral Tide, aka Australian expat Ivan Bullock. A Tokyo resident of three years, Bullock seems to have spent most of his time at home with his keyboards, effects and mixers, if his debut album is anything to go by. A decidedly moody work influenced by industrial-oriented dance music, *Whirlpools of Souls* is a carefully constructed album that shows the results of Bullock's years of classical study of the violin and piano. The album kicks off with the ambient atmospherics of "Abandoned," before continuing through 13 dark yet danceable tracks with names like "Sinner" and "Creation" that indicate the artists' spiritual concerns. For more info see www.mystraltide.com



HERBERT

Second Hand Sounds

(Peacefrog)

Having convinced Japanese clubbers in his recent Mechanics of Destruction tour that he just may be the salvation of techno, UK sampling wunderkind Matthew Herbert returns with a two-disc outing of remixes and previously unreleased tracks. Although Herbert's house beats may sound familiar, his choice of sounds doesn't: that's because he invents all his beats by sampling household objects, hence the title *Second Hand Sounds*. What you'll find here, then, is warm, funky house of the most danceable sort, full of lovely abstract sounds and floating vocals, yet free from the tired clichés that makes so much dance music sound alike. Herbert's choice of tracks to remix is equally unusual, as exemplified by a bizarre reworking of Serge Gainsbourg's "Bonnie and Clyde." For dance fans tired of the same old samples, Herbert may just have the answer.



BLACK REBEL MOTORCYCLE CLUB

B.R.M.C.

(Virgin/Abstract Dragon)

It was wisely stated over two years ago that rock'n'roll was making a comeback, and hallelujah what a truth was that! All spoilt for rock choice and delirious with The Strokes, The White Stripes and now this, it seems every one's gone a bit, em...punk. This is a genuine pogoing album, undeniably rhythmic and melodic, it screams for people to just enjoy it, in a drunken delirium, religious fervor, loving passion or just simple angst. The self-titled debut drives along with few hiccups and is strangely original for the overtly plagiarized arena of rock. B.R.M.C. stand out as a truthful and gutsy band that have come in remarkable answer to their own question, "What ever happened to my rock'n'roll (punk song)?" Sally Mizon



VARIOUS ARTISTS

Sputnik presents: Travelling without moving

(Techno Flux)

The musically inclined, designer-friendly people at Tripster, which coordinates the infamous Sputnik beach parties at Tsujido, south of Tokyo, have added this compilation of beach-side beats to a Sputnik empire that also features a magazine and interior design store. As soothing as the summer breeze, this two-CD album features thoroughly chilled tracks across both discs—"dawn" and "dusk"—with Salt Water Sound, from an outfit on the up, Zero7, a stand-out. For those who like their grooves with low BPM, the other tracks by Pepe California, DJ Food, Nobukazu Takemura, Calm and many others should have the most stressed-out Tokyoite thinking of sun and sangria on even the coldest of winter days. Simeon Paterson